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ABSTRACT

Controversy is the current state of opinion among librarians and others about the future of libraries. The proponents of the electronic library say that now that information is readily available from sources other than the library, the role of the library must be rethought. Some of the advocates of the electronic library see the elimination of the library as place. The traditional institutional approach is a variant of the electronic library position. The traditionalists realize that libraries are about more than providing information, but the path that they take will place, in the same camp as the electronic library. They also seek to reinvent the library with marketing approaches where patrons become customers. The grassroots/humanist camp argues that libraries need not strip themselves of what is valuable in the library tradition. They argue that the library can fulfill the needs of the individual and the community. They believe that libraries embody many attributes, one of which is to provide a focal point for the community. These questions are explored through the medium of a small community library in Harrisburg, Ohio. (Contains 12 references.) (Author)

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The Harrisburg Library and the Future of Public Libraries

A Master's Research Paper submitted to the
Kent State University School of Library Science
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Library Science

by

Michael J. Daly

May, 1997

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Master's Research Paper by

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Abstract

Controversy is the current state of opinion among librarians and others about the future of libraries. The proponents of the electronic library say that now that information is readily available from sources other than the library; the role of the library must be rethought. Some of the advocates of the electronic library see the elimination of the library as place. The traditional institutional approach is a variant of the electronic library position. The traditionalists realize that libraries are about more than providing information, but the path that they take will place, in the same camp as the electronic library. They also seek to reinvent the library with marketing approaches where patrons become customers. The grassroots/humanist camp argues that libraries need not strip themselves of what is valuable in the library tradition. They argue that the library can fulfill the needs of the individual and the community. They believe that libraries embody many attributes, one of which is to provide a focal point for the community. These questions are explored through the medium of a small community library in Harrisburg, Ohio.

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the position of the public library in the United States as the century draws to a close. The public library, like other institutions, is being challenged to prove its worth in order to survive. The continued existence of the public library is situated in a period of widespread public distrust of government, a crisis in public education, and enormous federal budget deficits. Some feel that all or most public institutions have failed and urge wholesale privatization of government functions. Occuring simultaneously is a technological revolution which may alter how we perceive and organize our lives. The ability to access information through a personal computer allows individuals to conduct business, shop from home and communicate with friends and families. Some would say that the future is a digital one and that old models are worn out. The combination of new technology and the percieved failure of public life are driving today's debate of what the 21st century will look like.

These new realities and beliefs apply equally to public libraries. Each institution that relies on taxes paid by skeptical citizens will be called on to justify itself and its public mission. The public library has been undergoing internal and external scrunity, and these ideas need to be understood to determine what the future holds for it. One conceptualization that flows directly from the digital revolution is the electronic library. Electronic library advocates argue that it can offer the same services that libraries have always provided, which is access to information, but much more completely and quickly. Moreover, this can be accomplished by reducing the role of librarians and repositioning the library as a comunications network. Another view believes that for libraries to survive, they must modernize themselves by developing the library into a service oriented institution which markets itself to the public who are now customers. A third proposal seeks to critically examine the role of libraries in America today and for the future.

This approach believes that libraries have a critic role to play by offering individuals a place to build community.

These are the three proposals that will be presented and examined for their theoretical and practical implications. Qualitative research and interviews will be used to determine what affect these ideas have on the lives of library users and citizens.

There is a small library in Harrisburg, Ohio in Franklin County which exists today precariously but is a focal point for not only the residents of Harrisburg but for citizens of other nearby towns and villages, some of whom come from different library districts. It is the existence of a library at all in Harrisburg, Ohio, which has only 345 residents, which stirs the imagination of this researcher because it has not been easy for the residents and readers of Harrisburg to keep their library and they may not be able to keep it.. At one time in early New England, there were no libraries, and as the historian of literary, Harvey Graff, shows how citizens came together for various purposes and formed libraries (Graff, 1994). In his essay, Graff discusses the many forms that libraries took in the early days of the American republic and how individuals were connected to these efforts. The citizens of New England were trying to improve and enrich their lives, and used the medium of the library as their tool. These early citizens took precious time and resources and expended it on acquiring books and organizing libraries in order to learn. In the space of two hundred years, what has happened to these impulses and desires?

Today, Ohio has some two hundred public libraries that are supported by citizens, but often in a rigid manner prescribed by law and bureaucracy. They are an "institution" with all the good and bad that the word implies. Yet, as the citizens of Harrisburg can testify, it is not easy to keep one of these institutions, even when the desire for it can be identified. The grassroot spirit that exists in Harrisburg is reminiscent of that which Graff describes. Yet, Harrisburg does not exist in isolation. Its loss of its "traditional"

library can be seen as part of a number of trends occurring in American culture. In the 1990s, because of the shrinkage and rationalization of traditional institutions such as schools and government, there was a withdrawing of federal and local support for these institutions. No other than James Billington, the Librarian of Congress, mourns this phenomena (Billington, 1993) And on the other hand the new prophets of the electronic library promise, through the magic of communication and the Internet, that a new age of freedom dawns. Where does a small town library in Southwest Franklin County fit into this picture? Are these citizens becoming functionally illiterate because their library has been downsized? Or should they retreat into their homes and seek their own individual route to the information superhighway; thus abandoning the community and its collective identity.

The experience of the Harrisburg Library reveals that a focus on community is one way to transform the library, to make it viable in the twenty-first century.

Methodology

To answer these and other questions, it is now time to look into proposals that are currently circulating about the future of libraries. I have selected three criteria: Library as Place, Library and its Educational Role, and the Profession of Librarianship. Each of these categories will be analyzed through four models of the library experience: the electronic library, the institutional library, the grassroots/humanist library and the Harrisburg library experience. The Harrisburg experience and analysis will be the research section of this paper. In order to bind these two sections together, I have developed a list of questions from each model that will look at the experience of the people who use the Harrisburg Library. The questions will seek to establish the holistic worldview of group of people who use the Harrisburg Library. The interview guide approach will be used so that in the course of the interviews certain, topics will be covered (Patton 1990, 286, 288).

The Grassroots/Humanist Model

Place - How do the users of the Harisburg Library conceive of their library as place? Perhaps the library users will see the library as an integral part of the community.

Education - How does the library aid education in Harrisburg? One view is that residents will see the library as enhancing the educational resources of the village.

Library as Institution

Bureaucracy - All institutions have bureaucracies. Harrisburg was once part of the Southwest Library District. A strong possibility is that from the early 1990s, the experience was a negative one.

Electronic Library

Technology The electronic library is about providing information primarily in a digital format. What do the residents think of and how do they react to new forms of information use? Do they see the need for electronic sources? One possibility is that the Harridsburg community would rather have a library than a workstation. They may also want both.

Model

Grassroots/Humanist Library and the experience of library as place, its educational role and its view of librarianship.

Electronic Library and the experience of library as place, its educational role and the profession of librarianship.

Institutional Library and the experience of library as place, its educational role and the profession of librarianship.

Harrisburg Library and the experience of library as place, its educational role and the profession of librarianship.

Literature Review

Library As Place in the Grassroots/Humanist model

One avenue that will help to understand the modern role of the public library is that of place. This seemingly innocuous concept can take on many different meanings. Once all libraries were places unless you were a traveling potentate and carried your "books " with you across the realm. There is a rich association of place with libraries. Examples include the great library of Alexandria, the Vatican Library and the New York Public Library. These buildings house collections of documents, which under certain rules can be seen or withdrawn by the public. These libraries exist, some in historical memory and some in actual life today as fixed geographical entities.

William Birdsall believes that, just as there is being created the myth of the electronic library, there already exists the myth of the library as place (Birdsall, 1993). Scattered across America are small and medium sized public libraries which are typified by their neo-classical facades. At the other end of the spectrum are such structures as the New York Public Library (NYPL). Both NYPL and the small town libraries are archetypes which operate in radically different milieus but convey the concept of library as place. Birdsall speaks of the library as an essential marker of the existence of small towns or large cities. They define community as much as having a local high school or city hall. The urban public library represents place as well, but in a different way. The NYPL symbolizes power, knowledgeand urbanity. Birdsall comments that libraries bring together contradictory values such as: rural/urban, community/individual and conservative/liberal. What Birdsall is discussing is that the library fulfills a number of functions. It is a focal structure of society and a place where different traditions and values can be situated, and if not reconciled, allowed at least to inhabit the same place. The library can fulfill the need of the individual and the community. The library is a

unique institution in that it can fulfill the needs of the individual and the community at the same time (Birdsall, 1994, 136).

Birdsall sees the library as part of an array of cultural institutions such as theaters and museums. These institutions allow individuals to participate in civil society where ideas can be discussed. These institutions are not rule-bound in the same way as work or school are. They are voluntary at heart. Libraries provide a "neutral" atmosphere to which one is invited but not forced to participate. Birdsall cites the goals of the American Library Association (ALA) Public Library Development Project as articulating the attributes of library as place. Specifically these are: library as community information center, as meeting place, and as a formal education support center (Birdsall 1993,144). For Birdsall, these three criteria are the heart of the library as place. Or, in the words of Tony Hiss, "...In short, the places where we spend our time affect the people we are and can become" (Hiss 1990).

Library as Place in the Electronic Library Model

However one of the salient suppositions by the promoters of the electronic library is that this era may be over. They believe that a visitor from a 21st century library who happened to visit a 20th century library would not recognize both as libraries (Hettrick 1996). Robert Hetterick argues that if libraries do not change or mutate into an electronic format; they will suffer the same fate as other industries that have failed to adapt.

Hetterick believes that paper collections will be around for some time, but that the real role of the library will be in networked information. The interesting part of this argument is that as more collections become available in digital format, they will be accessible from anywhere at any time. Or, as Hetterick says, "Information is stripped of its temporal and geographic constraints" (Hetterick, 168). Thus, the library is no longer

confined to documents that are housed within a physical location. And if the documents no longer need to be housed, What happens to the house?

Hetterick does not really see a role in the future for the public library. His time span also is short and is in within the next decade. The reason that Hetterick can dismiss libraries is because "...Institutions built on a philosophy of mediation will not survive the information age." (Hetterick, 173) And the reason for this statement is because of smart software, cost pressures and user preferences. Libraries in the coming decades will not be able to rely on government subsidies and will have to develop new sources of revenues. Hetterick recommends electronic publishing as one possible avenue. He also suggests that libraries act as Internet and web brokers, but he sees enormous competition in these areas.

While some library "futurists" see little future for libraries, other authors take a more cautionary approach. This is the case with Agnes M. Griffin, director of the Montgomery County Public Library System (Maryland). Griffin clearly identifies with the information revolution and cites Brian Haskins "...we must have universal access to information in all possible media via a single multifunctional workstation" (Griffin 1996). Yet, Griffin clearly states her allegiance to the traditional public library. Griffin believes that libraries must engage the electronic information future and uses guidelines issued by the American Library Association Telecommunications Policy Roundtable to accomplish this task.

Griffin first looks at universal access and believes that libraries need to make sure that, in the information age, that access remains open to all as it was to previous generations of library users. Griffin comments that information providers and producers promise an ever-expanding universe of free access, but it is the job of libraries to ensure that it happens. In order for access to be made possible and to reduce cost, Griffin recommends more automation of clerical tasks and more-user friendly interfaces. One

question that this raises is why do we start to worry about costs of providing "free access" to electronic information as opposed to traditional information costs? In some senses, Griffin might be considered as part of the institutional library camp because of her work as director of a large county library system, and her comments that libraries are about more than information. However, in regards to library as place Griffin believes "The final task that public libraries must take on is to reinvent the public library as a virtual enterprise" (Griffin, 61). This project would mimic the actual library(if it still existed) in all its phases from checkout to checkin, book talks, and everything in between. The "cybrary" would have an interface that mimics an existing library. Griffin refers to the CARL Corporation's Kids Catalog that includes an electronic map of the library with clickable pointers to shelves. Librarians could be virtually summoned to deliver reader advisories and give short book talks. Griffin imagines a junior great books discussion online (Griffin, 64). Griffin admits that the "cybrary" at present is a fantasy but that the implications are clear. Coupled with the ideas put forward by Hetterick, it is nothing less than the physical elimination of the library as place. Along with Hetterick, Griffin reinvents the library, perhaps as a telecommunication center.

The Experience of Place in the Institutional Model

When first looking at the experience of place in the Baltimore County Public Library (BCPL), it is interesting to note that BCPL is an amalgamation of small, independent community libraries (BCPL 1992). It would also be interesting to go back to 1948 and see what prompted this decision. Perhaps William Birdsall would mourn the loss of these libraries. For today, they have been transformed into a modern institution with over 500,000 card holders and a catalog of more than 1, 300,000 items. From the map in the front of their manifesto, an observer gets a look at the placement of the BCPL branches. The branches follow the outline of I-695 which encircles the City of Baltimore.

This was not planned growth but follows a trend in American culture and demographics which saw an exodus from the cities to the suburbs. BCPL endorses this trend and attacks those in the library community who still see the need for central city libraries. But this is in keeping with the philosophy of BCPL which is one based on the retail experience (BCPL, 52). For BCPL the choice is clear if the large department store is no longer built downtown; then neither should the library. One might ask what happens to the residents of these central cities as far as library services are concerned. For BCPL , "a community library branch structure is the bedrock point of service for residents and commuters." Yet, nine of these branches were closed and twenty-four librarians were laid off in 1996 (R R Bowker 1994).

In order to gain a profile of the community, BCPL develops a profile of each branch, utilizing a method called SCAN or Statistical Community Analysis. SCAN collects data from the census tracts which are assigned to the branch and the information includes demographic data, topographic and transportation information, a list of community associations and circulation analysis (BCPL, 141). There is no mention here of the library as a gatheing place; outside of the fact that meetings take place at branches.

The Library As Educational Institution - The Grassroots/Humanist Perspective

Although few would argue that one purpose of the library is educational; it is an extremely important concept for those who support the grassroots/humanist library. Phyllis Dain writes of these fundamental aspects of libraries from a historical perspective "the major perceived value of public libraries was educational" (Dain 1996). According to Dain, in the period after the Civil War, reading was considered as a worthy endeavor, and so were those institutions that sustained and nourished reading, i.e. libraries. Dain also believes that libraries were instrumental in helping to educate citizens so they could

act intelligently and reasonably, which is called self-governance. Self-governance is a concept that is necessary to make a democracy such as the United States function.

Looking at libraries as someone who is not from the profession, Raymond Williams, a social and literary critic discusses libraries as a center for permanent education (Williams 1978). Williams introduces permanent education by remarking that it is likely that many people will have more than one job or career in their lifetime. He then posits the library as an institution at the center of society that will be there to assist people in the task of permanent education. He suggests that we need to have or become a learning society.

In his discussion of libraries and life chances, William Birdsall suggest some of the ways that education and libraries can join together. In the 19th century, libraries served as a bridge for new immigrants to assimilate into American society. Today, libraries can continue this role by introducing children to the world of books, helping them develop language and stimulating the imagination.

Other scholars cited by Birdsall call for a learning society. The National Council of Learned Societies and the Federation of State Humanities Councils argues that telecommunications technology can nourish technology but not communities. These organizations cite the need for "parallel schools" of which the library is one. The library can be seen as a neighborhood learning center where people can interact and where information can become knowledge and perhaps wisdom. The social process is what is needed for those who believe that learning is socially constructed. In addition, Birdsall cites the ALA Public Library Development Project. Most of these eight principles pertain to education but some more than others. Specifically, the library should be a gateway to preschoolers for learning, stimulate independent learning, act as a formal education support center and as a research center. In conclusion, Birdsall offers these remarks "The library supports an educated, self-reliant, and productive citizenry, thus

contributing to the stability, attractiveness and economic well-being of the community" (Birdsall p145).

The Library as Educational Institution - The Electronic Library Perspective

Gary Pitkin, the editor The National Electronic Library addresses the question of education in the academic environment. One part of the mission statement of the University of North Colorado libraries is "the libraries serve as educator to ensure that all members of the university community are information-literate" (Pitkin 1996). Information literacy is defined as the ability to understand, manipulate and evaluate information. In order to accomplish these tasks, Pitkin offers various strategies. These include: workshops for faculty and students, specialized seminars for incoming students and two approaches unique to the information age. Pitkin speaks of the electronic classroom which will be a state-of-the-art facility for teaching access to the various automated systems and the Internet. He also describes "library escort", which is a computerized instruction program that provides a description of library services and collection and serves as a library tutor and research assistant. It is interesting to note that the concept of the electronic library has come from the academic library which is research oriented. But, as Robert Hetterick states, all libraries will have deal with the computer and telecommunications revolution. It becomes to easier to see the migration of the electronic library from the academic to the public library. The creation of the "virtual library" by Agnes Griffin now has an antecedent. It would seem for the electronic library that, as smarter software becomes available, it will solve problems of education and library instruction.

The Library as Educational Institution - The Institutional Library Perspective

One might wonder how a library that describes itself as public information utility which is no different than water or post office service would approach education. The BCPL mission statement provides part of the answer: "...assure the provision of the

public's access to education, education in its broadest sense, encompassing all the resources available presently in the printed word, and in the future in electronic form" (BCPL, 11). How does this work out in the branch system of which BCPL is so proud. A sampling of the BCPL home page for the Arbutus branch shows a wide variety of educational programming. Arbutus offered traditional children's program which is oriented by season, as well as small business and how to overcome computer phobia. The home page news also announced new program called ALP. ALP,or the Adult Learning Partnership, is a multi-media computer which uses self-instruction method for Adult Basic Education/GED and English for speakers of other languages. Here is another example of the electronic library in action. According to BCPL, most of the decision making about programming is made at the branch level. Decisions are reached by using the SCAN system described earlier.

The Librarian in the Grassroots/Humanist Library

The profession of librarianship began to remerge as libraries after the Civil War. According to Phyllis Dain, librarians organized themselves fairly quickly and developed a service related ethic and a concern for community needs (Dain, 65). Early librarians did not see themselves as part of government or civil service but as part of the emerging professionalism of 19th century America.

This role was fairly well established and acceptable to most in the field. However, according to William Birdsall, a shift occurred in the 1970s as the implications of the information society became clearer. The unease among librarians increased as information came to be recognized as a commodity. Once information was accepted as commodity it could be used, copied, created, and stored like other commodities (Birdsall, 2). This change had a profound effect on the profession. Once information was treated in this manner, it could be withdrawn from the province of the library. It is at this juncture that such influential figures as F.W. Lancaster urge that librarians become

"information consultants" and lose the other trappings of the profession such as service and community knowledge provider (Birdsall, 96).

It is obvious that Birdsall prefers a different orientation for the profession. His alternative is the concept of the therapeutic librarian. Birdsall comments that librarians are members of the people working professions. These workers are concerned primarily with the personalities of their clients. In constructing this model of the librarian as therapist, Birdsall draws on the work of Carl Rodgers and his client-centered therapy. Birdsall feels that by adopting this new role which has its roots in earlier models of the profession; he hopes to offer an alternative to the information consultant. The main activity of the therapeutic librarian would be to provide to the client the tools needed to be independent (bibliographic instruction). Birdsall also relies on the work of David Maxfield and his concept of the reference interview "...The major emphasis is on counseling...it is not upon any information that is to be imparted, but upon aiding the individual toward self-motivation and self-decision: that is to say, developmental in character" (Birdsall, 82). Thus, Birdsall believes that a new role can be achieved for librarians.

The Librarian in the Institutional Library

On page 68 of the BCPL report is a photograph of a library checkout scene and the caption reads, "most library uses come down to this." On its face this is undeniably true, but it underscores the relationship of BCPL to its "customers" and says much about its staff policies. Despite its lofty aims in regard to education as described in the last section, efficiency is the real goal of all BCPL policies. When it comes to the role of librarians, BCPL wants generalists not specialists. Citing a labor shortage of MLS degreed professionals in the 1960s BCPL developed a para-professional staff model (BCPL, 101). The library associate program is administered by the Maryland Department of Education and associates receive 75 hours of instruction over a ten month

course. In 1992 BCPL had 152 librarians on staff; 93 were associates. The MLS degree is still required for managers and administrators. One of the traditional roles of the librarian, which is collection development, has been reduced and centralized to an administrative function. One of the benefits of the generalist policy is that staff are cross- trained in information and in adult and children's services. However, since the staff is minimally trained, it is not clear how beneficial this policy is to staff or patrons.

The Librarian in the Electronic Library

In his essay, The Neographic Library, Kenneth Dowlin makes some interesting remarks about the library of the future. Unlike some other enthusiasts of the electronic library, Dowlin at least believes that there will be a library (since he just built the new San Francisco Public Library). However, he does see change in the role of libraries and librarians. One prominent change is that the librarian/patron encounter will be reduced because of smart technology. The role of technicians however will be enhanced in case the smart software fails. Librarians will be required to become more generalists in and less subject oriented in their work. Essentially, the role of the librarian will be more of the nature of the last encounter as opposed to the first (Dowlin 1992). This is because the emphasis will be more on access and less on collection. Only the technologically illiterate and the most resolute of patrons will find a librarian.

Robert Hetterick, who is more pessimistic about the library as place, also agrees with Dowlin about the future of librarians. Hetterick says that "disintermediation" will move the role of the librarian one step back and the users' first encounter will be with smart software (Hetterick, 173). Librarians who are seen as mediators by Hetterick will have to find a new role. He advises that libraries and librarians become publishers and organizers of electronic information. However, he warns that the librarian's role as traditional organizer of knowledge will not fit into the ever changing resources of the Internet.

The concept of librarian in the future as outlined by Agnes Griffen is seen as a transitional one. In the near future, librarians will still be assisting patrons in learning new technologies, but the smart software will eliminate the routine reference questions. One new role that Griffen sees for libraries is community public access networks. This, she argues is in keeping with the traditions of the library in helping to provide access to all. In the cybrary, librarians, will assume the roles of administrators and facilitators of community learning networks.

The role of the librarian in the electronic library of the future may be severely reduced, and those who are left will be more managers than traditional librarians. The direct contact with the patron will dwindle but contact with the broader community may increase.

The Harrisburg Library

This section will analyze comments from the interviews conducted with individuals connected to the Harrisburg Library. These comments will be discussed in relation to four categories: Place, Education, Libraries, and Librarians and Technology.

A few brief comments about the Harrisburg Library are necessary in order to place the discussion in context. The Harrisburg Library was initially a branch of the Southwest Library System in Franklin County. For its first two decades, the library prospered and expanded. This situation ended when Southwest decided to close the library because it felt that it could not support this branch any longer. The citizens of Harrisburg and the surrounding area who used the library formed a committee to negotiate to keep their branch open. Eventually, a compromise was reached which kept the library open with funding only for materials and maintenance. The library was kept open with volunteers and a part-time paid coordinator. In 1994, Southwest decided to close the branch permanently, but the Village government reached an agreement with Southwest which gave the library over for the village to run which included the building

and its contents. Subsequently the village placed a 1% income tax on the ballot to help maintain the library. This tax passed and one-third of the levy is for the operation of the library. Currently, the library is open three days a week. The future of the library is still in doubt because it is not known how much revenues will be generated by the income tax.

It is somewhat of an injustice to the users of the Harrisburg Library to break into fragments what for them is a total experience. Residents of Harrisburg and the surrounding area have used the library for many purposes and it is part of the fabric of their lives. In response to being questioned about the connection between the library and the village, residents were astonished that the question needed to be even asked. A partial listing of their comments about the subject of place are:

The Harrisburg Library and Place

- When a building becomes part of a community it has a history.
- People have vivid memories of certain things that happened here.
- For twenty years you could come to this library and find out who had died and who was being born.
- The library was the community center.
- It was a safe place for kids and adults.
- We were a listening post for the mothers.

These comments illustrate how the Harrisburg Library was and is part of the daily life from early childhood through retirement and on. The patrons formed emotional attachments to the library and each other. By being a place that has meaning, the library transcends its functionally and emerges as part of the community. The Harrisburg Library is able to bridge the gap between the individual and community that William Birdsall believes is one of its most important duties.

The institutional library, however, does not value place in the same way. The institutional library provides services that are more in tune with modern urban, suburban and between cities where geography and emotion do not coincide. The institutional library is driven by a retail concept more akin to a shopping center. This retail mentality, when applied to libraries like Harrisburg, will result in their being closed. The libraries that circulate the most will be kept open. The BCPL bemoans the fact that the Enoch Pratt Free Library of Baltimore was criticized when it wanted to close local branches in Baltimore. BCPL also criticizes the new construction of central city or downtown libraries which strive to revitalize the culture of cities like Chicago. These criticisms come from the modern American tendency to spread outward and abandon their beginnings and consume more and more land.

The library in this context becomes another large institution like the government, corporations and unions that citizens feel out of touch with. The Harrisburg experience, because it has roots in the everyday life of its readers, is able to overcome this alienation.

The electronic library is even more severe in its withdrawal from the traditional library setting. Information can now be more easily bought and sold and no longer needs to reside anywhere especially in a library. Both the institutional and the grassroots library lose their purpose in the information age and will not survive except possibly as network providers. The electronic library does not see the library as more than the sum of its parts.

Agnes Griffin, in her discussion of the electronic library, also discusses the issue of the withdrawal from public life in the 1990s "Cocooning" is the trend which describes the retreat into the electronic cottage where people work and play at home through the medium of the computer. This is a particularly middle and upper-class view which assumes that everyone can afford a multi-tasking work station. The retreat from public life is not one shared by Harrisburg Library users, at least where their library is

concerned. The library was and is interwoven with the seasonal rituals of life, and some citizens said that village activities took their lead from what the library was planning.

The Harrisbug Library and Education

- The kids met at the library to visit and do homework
- The kids came after school and stayed there until their parents picked them up
- You have families here where both parents work because of the times and children could be brought to the library right after work
- We had some adults who were going back to college
- There were ten very good students at the village school and they were ones who used the library.
- We have very little material for college students.
- Kids came in to learn how to listen, interact and participate with others

For the children of Harrisburg and the surrounding area, the library served in different contexts. The library was a homework center, but over and over, mention was made of the assistance that children received there. It is one thing to have a building where kids go after school and an environment where children are welcome and nurtured. Another indication of child centered atmosphere was the threatened closure. The community became very concerned over loss of services to children, and parents were motivated to volunteer at the library and rally against the closing.

It is important to understand that the Harrisbug Library not only functioned as a formal educational support center, in library terms, but it also functioned a meeting place for area children. The subject of the two working parents came up often and all the stresses and strains that this involves. Many parents would not have been able to make that extra trip into Grove City or Columbus if the Harrisburg Library did not exist. The Harrisburg Library thus served as a buffer against some of the pressures of modern life.

Harrisburg Library and Librarianship

- I still feel that small schools and libraries work well
- We took it for granted before and then when it was going to close we valued almost every book there.
- We may not have the best and the newest but we kept the oldest.
- Some libraries are cold structures
- The Harrisburg Library crosses boundaries
- We didn't have departments.
- You got up from behind the desk and found the book.

It is suprising that the patrons of the Harrisburg Library do not have a negative attitude toward libraries, considering the struggle they went through. They do feel that larger libraries do lack in concern for the needs of users. However some of this is attributed to size and complexity.

The Harrisburg image of the librarian fits in well with the grassroots/humanist framework. Both perspectives see the librarian as developing a warm and sympathetic environment. William Birdsall suggests the concept of the therapeutic librarian and in one striking instance the Harisburg Library reflects this. In this small community, one commentator said that the library was a listening post - that is the library served to let people express themselves about the difficulties of modern life. This "therapeutic" library was able to provide a center. The library can help fill the gap that many people feel when traditional institutions have vanished or have changed beyond recognition.

The institutional nature of the library is also addressed by those interviewed. Harrisburg sits right on the border between Franklin and Pickaway counties, Madison county is three miles to the west. Many individuals in this area found it easier to go to Harrisburg rather than their "official" library. People were interested in library services and not in library districts.

The staff at the Harrisburg Library were, by necessity, generalists. This corresponds to the ideas put forward by the BCPL and others who increasingly see the need for librarians to cross interdepartmental boundaries to serve patrons. One Harrisburg interviewee was distressed by the "pointing" by library staff that goes on in many libraries. Another aspect of modern institutional libraries that Harrisburg residents would find distasteful is the merchandising concept embraced by BCPL. In the latter stages of the Southwest administration of Harrisburg, a decision was made to make the branch into a "stop and go library." This approach also meant moving to a display format for materials and a reduction in the amount of books available. The Harrisburg Library was not conceived of as a supermarket by its patrons and they resented this intrusion of marketing into their library. Another consequence of this new design was the reduction of the patron's ability to browse the shelves. Something else was being lost: and that was the role of the library as a preserver of culture and tradition. The citizens could see their history being taken from them.

The position of the librarian in the electronic library is not one that would be shared by the Harrisburg users. The people who used the Harrisburg Library were more interested in the social aspects of information which would be knowledge and learning. They also felt comfortable with the role of the librarian as mediator and adviser. However, it was emphasized that children were given library instruction to help them understand how the library operated.

The Harrisburg Library and Technology

- Technology is where everything is going.
- Computers are fine but if your going to have everything computerized your going to have: haves and have nots.
- We could use a computer to help us catalog.

- I feel that technology will make libraries colder structures. I hope they won't lose all of their community feelilng.

The position of Harrisburg area citizens concerning the use of technology in their library was ambivalent. A number of people expressed interest in having a computer to help find information more quickly. This expressed their desire to help patrons. Yet they were also proud of their ability to fulfill needs by knowing their collection and being able and willing to work with users. Often the comment was made of the inevitability of computer technology dominating work and family life. They also expressed dismay that this was occurring but seemed resigned to it happening. Another concern was the issue of access to information, which they felt could result in a society of those with computers and those who couldn't afford the expense associated with the information age. This line of argument is precisely the one raised by the proponents of the electronic library. They feel that it is the natural role of the library to provide access through introduction of new technology. Of course with this new method of providing information will come changes to the library. One of these changes will be automation of certain functions such as reference. The people of Harrisburg are troubled by these changes while the advocates of the electronic library are not. Once again this shows that members of the Harrisburg community are more concerned with the social aspects of the library than many who work in and write about libraries and their future.

Conclusion

"...If we don't reaffirm the value of libraries as a place, they will only exist as a nostalgic memory - not unlike the the corner drugstore" (Cisler 1996). The citizens of Harrisburg and their neighbors have chosen to affirm their library as place. This puts them squarely within the grassroots/humanist tradition. Their library is one where not only materials can be accessed but in which experience takes place. In the best tradition of American libraries, this experience can be both public and private. The Harrisburg

Library is a heartening example of how libraries can enrich the democratic tradition of citizen involvement. Peter Dobkins Hall's writing on the history of libraries reminds us that libraries have always had a mixture of private and public support (Hall 1996). However, this partnership must be consciously renewed in order for it to survive. Private citizens must be able to feel that they have a stake in the Library as it exists as an institution. The support of libraries by a mixture of public and private support was not always a fact. It would be very ironic if we were to return to before the beginnings of public libraries when only the affluent had access to books and information.

The institutional library is headed in the direction of the electronic library unless it can justify itself. Eventually the bookstore format will not be able to compete with other entertainment institutions that are not tax supported.

William Birdsall and others suggest that libraries seek more involvement in their communities and consciously articulate the library as a place for citizens to become themselves.

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Appendix A - Harrisburg Questions

Place

How does the library contribute to or give Harrisburg a sense of place and community.

How do you feel about the library's location. Is their a special connection that exists?

Education

Describe how the library impacts you and your family's educational needs.

If the library closed, what would be the impact on your family.

Institution

Libraries are a public institution. Describe your feelings about them.

Is the Harrisburg library different from other libraries in your experience?

Technology

How do you feel about computers in libraries